

THE
DISCIPLINE
OF THE
METHODISTS
DEFENDED,

IN A LETTER TO

MR. SMITH, LONGRIDGE, &c.

IN ANSWER TO THEIR LATE

ADDRESS

TO THE

Methodist Societies.

By Joseph Benson

AMICUS SOCRATES, AMICUS PLATO,
MAGIS AMICA VERITAS.

LONDON PRINTED.

1796.



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THE
DISCIPLINE OF THE METHODISTS
DEFENDED.

Leeds, March 22, 1796.

My dear Brethren,

WAS very sorry to have a printed Letter put into my hands signed by your names. I have known many of you for upwards of twenty years, and with some of you have long been in habits of great intimacy. The Chairman of your Meeting, in particular, has been one of the most intimate friends I have had, ever since I was first in the Newcastle Circuit, which was in the year 1772. And I am grieved that you should have a hand in any thing that seems calculated to stir up strife among us, or to prove, to any, an occasion of falling. This, I am persuaded, you do not intend. I know most of you so well, that I give you full credit for what you assert respecting the *uprightness* of your intentions. But some of you have lived long enough in the world to have learned that, with the best intentions, we may inadvertently give occasion to much evil. With all the love and friendship we owe you, and still feel towards you, I will tell you plainly why I think you have taken a false step in publishing this Letter, and wherein it appears to me you are mistaken.

Although you tell us in your first resolution "you all agree that the *present* is a suitable opportunity for expressing the sentiments of the Societies" in your Circuit (you should have said *your own sentiments*) on the subjects you are pleased to take into consideration, "to the Connexion at large;" yet considering the disputes which have agitated our body for four years last past, and the very critical situation in which matters were

involved last year, a situation which rendered it very difficult to prevent an entire division from taking place among both *Preachers* and *People*, it surely was a time most *unsuitable*. Was it proper to bring forward fresh matters for debate before we were agreed about those already upon the carpet? or to raise suspicions and suggest ideas which will inflict *new wounds* on our body, before it was half healed of those formerly inflicted? are the disputes respecting the *Lord's Supper*, *Baptism*, the *Burial of the Dead*, and *Services in Church-hours*, so amicably and fully settled, that it is now time to begin debating about something else? You know the contrary. You know that these wounds are hardly skinned over, much less are they thoroughly and radically healed. The sore still festers and gathers in many places, and perhaps will not be cured without those amputations, and other painful operations, which it is desirable, if possible, to avoid.

Your Letter, it is true, may answer one end. It may draw the attention of some from the former causes of debate to others, and the contending parties may leave one *bone* to quarrel about *another*. But alas! I fear they will find it equally *dry* with those about which they have so lately tore each others flesh. Pray my brethren, for the Lord's sake, let the *People* whom you profess to be so much concerned, have some respite. Let them have a little time to remember that they have souls to be saved, and to use those means that are calculated to save them. How long shall they be kept in the fire of *strife* and *contention*? When shall they be suffered to return from pursuing and smiting one another? Before the fresh bone of contention was thrown out we were only two parties, the one wishing for, and the other against, the introduction of the *Sacrament*. Now, so far as your Letter gains attention, and commands belief, we shall be four. For its natural tendency is to divide *both*, and produce two parties more; the one will espouse, and the other reject your doctrinal form of church government.

In the mean time, it is not difficult to foresee the consequences, which, in all probability, will ensue upon these proceedings. Like the *Dissenters* in the last century, we shall dispute about *Plans of government*, and external ordinances, till the *life of religion* and all that is worth contending for, be lost in squabbles.

quabble; and we shall have nothing left but the dry
 forms which the divided parties, on each side, may
 have secured. You complain of a *worldly spirit*, of
division in Societies, and of *want of love to the Preach-*
ers, and yet you are taking, I fear, the very steps which
 partly *proceed from* and partly *tend to encrease* these
 evils. How happens it, think you, that the minds of
 so many are now turned to, and engrossed by these
 outward things, but because they have, in whole or in
 part, lost that *inward union* with God, which was once
 their all in all, and to guard and preserve which was
 once their chief care. And do you imagine that to
 keep them disputing about this and that mode of wor-
 ship and form of church-government will restore what
 they have lost, and give them back their first love?
 Oh! no: it will only feed and increase their spiritual
 disorders. Remember, Brethren, the Methodists, very
 truly, were not a people. Permit me then to enquire,
 what means did they thus rise from nothing! Was
 it by Plans of government and modes of worship?
 Surely no: but simply by the *Word of God*, and *Prayer*,
 with the exercise of that discipline which some parts
 of your Letter is manifestly calculated to overthrow.
 In this head I now proceed to explain myself.
 Your 1st Position is "That according to the present
 existing rules of conference, the Methodist Preachers
 rule their people without consulting them." I wish
 you had explained yourselves more fully on this point,
 and told us precisely what you mean by our *ruling* the
 people. For my part it appears to me that our *authority*
 over them, and their *subjection to us*, is so small, that we
 can hardly be said to rule them at all. And I think
 your present Letter is a demonstration of this. For
 if we had any such *authority* over you as you
 speak of, you would not have written in the manner
 you have done. However if *Christ* rule them it will
 be sufficient for their salvation, which I trust, is the
 only end we aim at. If by *ruling the people* you mean
 Preaching the word of God to them, or our de-
 claring, according to the best of our knowledge, the
 things which they must believe, the *privileges* they must
 experience, and the *duties* which they must perform, in
 order to their salvation, it is true in this sense we
 generally rule them without consulting them. It is
 our custom, (I will not say when we go with, or
 without invitation, to a new place, but not even when
 we

we preach to an *old* established Congregation) first call the people together, to enquire of them what kind of doctrine they would wish us to inculcate upon them, or what will *please* or what will *offend* them. Altho' even in this, where we have any Chapels, the Trustees of those Chapels, have authority to call us to an account, and if they judge our doctrine false, or contrary to that taught among us from the beginning they may deny us the use of their Pulpits. Now is this the point in which you want an alteration? Instead of letting that power remain with *Trustees*, would you wish it to be lodged in the whole Congregation? In other words, would you wish the whole Congregation to be constituted Trustees? or would you wish a Law to be enacted amongst us, that no Preacher should presume to address a Congregation, without first enquiring of them, "What doctrine it is their pleasure he should declare to them?" This is certainly the *chief authority* we exercise any where, and if in this point you require no change, we shall soon settle the rest.

I presume you will say, That it is not matters of doctrine, but of discipline, to which you refer, when you affirm that we *rule the people, without consulting them*. If so, permit me to say that you are either very inattentive, or very forgetful. For a full and perfect confutation of this assertion, I need only refer to the Minutes of our Conferences, which are the repositories of our rules, and the authentic documents of our proceedings in the government of our Societies. It will then appear, how far you have truth on your side when you affirm, "That the present Rules of the Conference imply that the people should not be consulted." To begin then at the lowest point, which we exercise discipline, and that which, in the formation of a Society, must precede all the rest, viz. The admission of Members. In the large Minutes, P. 12, Q. 14, it is enquired, "How shall we prevent improper persons from insinuating themselves into the Society. And the answer is 1st. Give Tickets to none till they are recommended by a Leader whom they have met at least two months on trial." 2nd. Give Notes to none, but those that are recommended by one you know, or till they have been three or four times in Class. 3d. Give them the Rules

which you know require universal reformation of manners) the first time they meet. See that this be never neglected." Now, Brethren, you see, according to our rules, we cannot so much as take a person into Society, or even admit an individual on trial, without consulting the Leaders or People. It is true, this rule can only apply to places where we already have a Society, and a *Leader* or *Leaders* to consult. In *fresh* places, we are obliged to do the best we can in this case, by consulting those that invite us to preach, or any on whose word we can best rely, respecting the character of those that offer themselves to be admitted as members.

But perhaps you will say "The preceding rule does not require you to consult *all* the Leaders, as to the admission of Members, and to act according to the judgment of the Majority." Consult *all* the Leaders! What? upon the taking in of every fresh member? Then both *we* and *you* shall have work enough. There need not be any revival of religion among us: upon this plan. Our Societies had need to remain pretty much at one stay!

But 2dly. As to the appointment of fresh *Leaders* and *Stewards*. "What rule, (you ask,) requires an Assistant to consult *Leaders* and *Stewards* in the appointment of *new Leaders and Stewards*." You mean, I suppose, where we already have a Society, with one or more Leaders and Stewards. For as to consulting them, where there are none, that is impossible. In this case, (which, you know, on our Plan *seeking and saving the lost*, wherever we can find them, is continually occurring) we are under a necessity of acting according to the best light and information we can get from any serious and judicious persons, in the place or neighbourhood. But wherever we have a Society, our custom, in this matter, is explicitly declared in the Minutes of the two last Conferences, and it is the very reverse of what you affirm. Minutes 1794, p. 32, "The Preachers, have ever appointed Leaders, chosen Stewards, and admitted members into and expelled them from the Society. *consulting their Brethren, the Stewards and Leaders*." And Minutes 1795, p. 36, "It has been our general custom never to appoint or remove a *Leader or Steward, without first consulting the Leaders or Stewards of the Society,*

"and WE ARE RESOLVED TO WALK BY THE SAME
"RULE." It is to be observed that the Stewards here
meant, are only the *Society or Circuit* Stewards, for
as to those Stewards to whom the reception and dis-
bursement of the Scat-rents, in our Chapels, belong,
and whose trust is generally twice as great as that of
the others, they, according to our rule, are appointed
by the Trustees, the Assistant Preacher only being pre-
sent and having but *one vote*. See Minutes 1794, p. 32.

But do not the Preachers *rule* the *Trustees* without
consulting them? Have they not an undue Power
over them? By no means. They cannot remove one
of them from his office *on any account whatever*, (al-
though according to some of the deeds of Trust the other
Trustees, or a majority of them may.) Nor can they
of themselves exclude one of them from the Society.
For in the Minutes, 1794, p. 33, it is enacted, that
"*no Trustee*, (however accused or defective in conform-
ing to the established rules of Society) shall be removed
from the Society, unless his crime or breach of the
rules of the Society be proved in the presence of the
Trustees and Leaders."

Now, my brethren, we have gone thro' the various
descriptions of *hearers, persons on trial, private Mem-
bers of Society, Leaders, Stewards and Trustees*, and we
have found your doctrine fail with regard to all of
them. We *do not* and *cannot*, according to our Rules,
rule *any* of them, without *consulting them*. It only
remains now that we consider the case of *Preachers*.
And as to *this point*, I will pledge myself to prove
that instead of our *ruling you*, you *rule us*, and that
without consulting us, nay and *judge and condemn us*.
See p. 33, of the last Minutes, you have an article
concerning discipline, the 2d. rule of which specifies
"That if the Majority of the *Trustees*, or of the *Stewards*
and *Leaders* of any Society, believe that any
Preacher, appointed for their Circuit, is *immoral, erro-
neous in doctrine, deficient in abilities*, or that he has
broken any of the rules of Conference, they shall have
authority to summon the Preachers of the District, and
all the Trustees, Stewards, and Leaders of the Cir-
cuit."— In this meeting not only each *Preacher*, but
"each *Trustee, Steward, and Leader*, shall have a vote."
And if it shall appear to a *majority* of this Meeting
that the Preacher is *immoral, or erroneous, &c.* shall

shall be considered as removed from the Circuit." In the next rule it is enacted, "That if any Preacher refuse to submit to the above mode of trial, he shall be considered as suspended till Conference."

Now, my brethren, recollect that the *Leaders, Stewards*, and *Trustees*, must always constitute a great majority of such a Meeting, and then say who rule. We or you? In *whom* is the greater power vested? and *who* have most reason to complain? I would advise you to be *quiet*, and rest satisfied with the power you have obtained, for if you do not, some of us will move the next Conference for an abrogation of the preceding rule, which many think very partial in your favour, and we have no doubt of carrying the motion, and then you may help yourselves as you can.

It appears then, that, according to our rules, the Preachers can exercise *no Power* over any *Trustee*, or *Leader*, or *private member* without consulting the approbation of the people or their representatives, the other Trustees, Stewards or Leaders; nay that without them they cannot so much as admit an individual into society or receive a person on trial. While on the other hand, you can *arraign, try, condemn* and execute any of us, *contrary to the judgment and against the will* of our fellow Labourers in the Circuit, of all the Preachers in the District, yea and in defiance of the *whole Conference*. This is not all. There are other instances, and those of a very important nature, in which also you *reign as kings without us*, and I pray God you may reign, that we may have only to be subject, and have no more contention with each other. "We are a Society, you say, in which *the people have no voice*." Now I can go a great way to prove that, in matters judged by the whole Connection to be the most important, next to doctrine, of any we have to do with, they *ONLY have a voice*. What things have been thought so important among us, for these four years last past, as those which respect the introduction of the *Sacrament, Baptism*, the *trial of the dead*, and *service in Church hours*? and yet three succeeding Conferences have left the determination of these points principally to the people or their representatives. At the last Leeds Conference, 1793, it was enacted, that the Preachers should not have power, how much so ever they might desire it, to introduce the Lord's Supper *any where* "unless the

whole Society were unanimous for it, and would not be contented without it." And the following year the decree was extended to include also *Baptism*, the *Burial of the Dead*, and *Preaching in Church-hours*, with only this alteration, that a change of the custom, as to these things, should not take place "where the union and concord of the Society could be preserved without it." I do not say that the rule in these cases was adhered to by every Preacher. Perhaps it was not. Nevertheless such was the rule, and it is of rules you speak. And if it was violated in some instances, you, I presume, will not complain, since it has long been the wish and study of the leading men among you to introduce these things as fast as possible, not only where the whole Society or a majority thereof, but where *any individuals*, however few in number, and young in experience, desired it. And yet you are for liberty, and for matters being determined according to the will of a majority!! To meet you as far as possible, and put things on as equitable a footing as might be, the last Conference decreed, that these important affairs should be left to the decision of the *Trustees, Leaders, and Stewards* in every place, a majority of whom are to determine concerning them. Only, to prevent deception, it is enacted that the consent of Conference should be obtained before their determination be carried into effect.

And now, what becomes of your assertions "that these things have not engaged the attention of Conference," and "that according to the present existing rules of Conference, the Methodist Preachers rule their people without consulting them." "You did well to add, "as far as we understand those rules," for it appears evidently you have not understood them at all.

But you ask further, "Have the Quarterly Meetings been consulted in the appointment of local Preachers, recommending Preachers to travel, or their exclusion?" I believe they generally have, and it is the wish of the Conference that they should, or at least that *those* should be consulted who are most proper to judge in this case, viz. the *Leaders, Stewards, Trustees*, and most judicious of the people, where the persons referred to, live. *These* probably have often an opportunity of hearing and conversing with them, and, be-

ing thoroughly acquainted with their life and conversation, must be much better able to judge than those Stewards, or local Preachers, from distant Societies, who, although attending the Quarter-Meeting, never heard, nor conversed with them, nay and perhaps do not so much as know them. And as to the case of recommending Preachers to travel, the Conference, who, I am certain, have it as much at heart as you can have, to prevent improper persons from gaining admission among us, will have no objection, I believe, to make a rule, *That no one shall be recommended at Conference to travel, who has not first been proposed at a Leader, Quarterly, and District Meeting, and approved by a majority in each.* And as to the exclusion of a travelling Preacher, or at least the removing of him from his Circuit, *that*, according to our late rule, is all your own. You can do it whenever you please, if you can but shew a just cause.

As to consulting the Quarter-Meeting about making and receiving collections, I see no impropriety in that. Why should a *general* Meeting be troubled with particular and *local* matters. The custom is to consult the Stewards, and generally the *Leaders* and *Trustees* also of each place where a collection is proposed to be made. Indeed as to the *quarterly* or *monthly* collections where they are in use, it is the business of the Stewards to remind us of the time when they shall be made, which they are in general very punctual in doing. And with respect to such as are made once a year, as that for Kingswood School, or the yearly subscription, our method is to consult with the Leaders and Stewards, as to the best time of making them. But you have my hearty consent, and I believe that of most of my brethren also, to take the *whole business* of *collections* and *subscriptions*, for carrying on the work, into *your own hands*. Devise a plan for raising what money is wanted, and receive and disburse it all, and welcome. You will save us a vast deal of time, and ease us of a great burden. And I hope from this time the Conference will insist on your doing it, if you wish to have Preachers sent you.

As to the division of Circuits, I have nothing to say. I think it is necessary that something more explicit should be enacted on this head, to prevent the Connexion from being burdened with an expence it

cannot bear. But this is but one single particular out of the many you allege, and even with regard to *this*, if it have any thing to do with our ruling the people, we do not rule them without *consulting them*, as I believe few instances can be produced of Circuits being divided without advising with the Stewards and leading persons in them. So that I accept your challenge and do "*deny* that we are a Society in which the people have no voice." For, if they speak by their *Leaders, Stewards, and Trustees*, they have a voice in every thing of importance, that respects any part of our doctrine, discipline or œconomy, and in some things a very loud and *authoritative* voice indeed. On the other hand, we have it not in our power to utter one alarming syllable to them. For, according to your own confession, they have always *one thing* in their power, and that is *resistance*. We cannot either take them into Society, or keep them in it *one moment*, much less can we rule them, as you express it, in *any sense whatever*, against *their will*, or *without their consent*. What therefore you say about "*one part of the human race treating the others as irrational beings*," is mere finesse, calculated only to inflame, and when you insinuate that it belongs to our system, you both strangely mistake the nature of that system, and forget what you yourselves and many ten thousands, both in Europe and America owe to it. I think too, that your words imply a strong censure of the conduct of our late venerable Father, whose Plan, you know, we have only altered in these matters, to accommodate it more to your views and wishes.

It appears evidently by all this, that your appeal in your 2nd. Position, to reason, revelation, and the natural order of Society, is without foundation. The 1st. Position having been shewn to be false, the end which is built upon it, falls of course. Nevertheless, if you amplify it afterwards, and quote a few Texts to prove that the primitive Christians were virtually consulted in the choice of their spiritual guides; I must so far notice what you advance, as to desire you to turn to those Texts again, and read them in connexion with the context, and you will see that there is not one of them that bears the most distant allusion, to any thing of the kind. Acts xvi. 1, relates entirely to the choice of Stewards to manage the Poor-Money. Acts

v. 22, 23, relates to the choosing of three Messengers to accompany Paul and Barnabas to Antioch, to carry a message. Acts xvi. 2. speaks only of the good character that Timothy bore among the brethren at Lystra, which it seems, induced St. Paul to take him along with him as a companion; and the other passage, viz. 1. Tim. iii. 10, refers only to the qualification that ought to be made of the *integrity*, and *fidelity* of Deacons, that is, temporal Stewards, before they be put into office, and entrusted with the money belonging to the Poor, or the Church, so that if you can find no better proofs than these, that people ought to be consulted in the choice of their spiritual guides, you fall sadly short indeed. And methinks, this circumstance alone might convince you that you are endeavouring to draw us from a *scriptural* Plan, to one that is *unscriptural*. It is true, in one sense, every man chooses, and must choose his spiritual guide: and is must be at full liberty to hear that Minister, Preacher he chooses, and to unite himself to that society or body of christians, he judges he can be most profited amongst. But to suppose that the Scriptures countenance the idea of people choosing, or appointing their own Preachers, is, I am satisfied, without foundation. The Epistles to Timothy, and Titus, which I refer you, are a demonstration to the contrary. The holy scriptures take for granted, what is certainly a truth, that the first and principal end of Gospel Ministry is to *call Sinners to repentance*, and *reform mankind*, and if sinners, are only to be thus reformed, and mankind reformed by those they choose to appoint, they will never be called, or reformed at all. For they will either choose and appoint *no* Preachers, or such as will, by their doctrine and example, encourage them in, and not reprove them for their sins. And altho' another, and very important end of Preaching be to *edify*, or build up in faith and holiness, such as are already converted, yet it is *Christ*, and not the *people*, that gives *Evangelists*, *Pastors*, and *Preachers* for this end; that is, by the gifts and graces of his Spirit, he qualifies them for, and *calls* them to work. Hitherto I believe we have been on the *scriptural* Plan in this business, and if you should depart from it, and by *forming an Aristocracy*, compel us to change it and adopt the Plan of the Dissenters, mark the

the consequences. Our congregations will soon be like many of theirs, either continually quarrelling with their Preachers, or divided and subdivided about the choice of them, while the one care and study of the Preachers must be, not to *profit* but to *please* their hearers, and especially those of them that are *rich*, on whom their maintenance will chiefly depend, and whom they must take care never to disappoint for any thing amiss in their spirit or conduct. You talk of Itinerancy being at an end; but on the Plan, to which, if I understand you, you are verging fast, it will be at an end indeed. For if our Societies or Circuits, begin to choose their own Preachers, cannot in the nature of things, subsist two years. They would undoubtedly be agreeable to some of us, as well as you: we should get congregations among you, and be very comfortably settled, at least as long as we could find means of pleasing you and retaining your good will. But the point to be considered is, would this be for the general good? for the spreading of religion in the nation? I presume the general opinion is that it would not. Take heed, therefore, I beseech you, how you take those steps, which will infallibly lead to it.

Perhaps you will wonder, why I have just used the word Aristocracy and applied it to you. For your opinion, it seems, is that the Preachers form an *Aristocracy* and that their power is contrary to the natural order of Society. "You know, you say, but of two precedents to countenance it: the one the Papal authority and the other *tyrannical civil Governments*." Perhaps. But I know a third, viz. the authority which the Christian Pastors and Teachers exercised over the Christian Church. That was nearly, if not altogether the same with that which we exercise over our Societies. They appointed Preachers, and Spiritual Guides, gave the right hand of fellowship, to those whom they believed God had called to the work of the Ministry. They preached the word to the people, and admitted into the Christian Church, those they judged to be true penitents and excluded such as walked disorderly and these and such like things they did, thro' the authority Christ had given them, altho' it is possible that, in doubtful cases, at least, they might consult the people. "But the two fore-mentioned powers, (the

Papal and that of tyrannical, civil governments,) both assume a power of dictating to their people, and require *implicit faith* and passive obedience." True, and therefore our authority does not resemble theirs at all, for we require neither the *one* nor the *other*: We only wish you to *believe* the *truths* Christ has plainly revealed, and to obey the *precepts* he has manifestly enjoined, and when we exercise our authority in the *present* instance, we can only deny a Ticket, or exclude from the Society those that openly transgress in the *latter* instance, viz. that manifestly violate Christ's commands.

In the mean time you are taking steps to form an Aristocracy of a very different kind, an Aristocracy which the sacred Scriptures know nothing of. You are endeavouring to form a powerful combination against that scriptural plan of proceeding which has been attended with such happy effects in this and in other countries. And although the measure is purely your own, or rather the contrivance of two or three of you, yet you would persuade us that you speak the language of the *people*, and that your Letter states the *sentiments of the Societies in your Circuits*: whereas I only venture to assert, that not one in 500 of them so much as know of your writing!! So much for your regard for the people!

But you are decidedly of opinion "that the evils complained of amongst us may be attributed to this *antisciptural* and *oppressive* system." I have shewn you that the system is neither *antisciptural* nor *oppressive*; and I can easily shew you how to account for the evils another way. "Is it not evident, you say, that the spirit of jealousy is destroying the spirit of love!" It is, and this Letter of yours, as it is the product of, so will add no little fuel to the fire of this jealous spirit. Do we not see a worldly spirit overspreading the connexion?" We do: and that spirit, the fruit of worldly prosperity, and neglect of the means of grace, induces many, like you, to raise a clamour about external ordinances and alterations of our Plan, instead of attending to what is of far more importance, the recovery of their first love and simplicity. You ask, "Is there not a dangerous tendency to division in many Societies?" Indeed there is. And from what cause? but the introduction of *new things*, and such

such changes of our œconomy, as you propose; changes which never can take place without consulting our whole body, unless you could prevail on 100,000 people of both sexes and of all descriptions, to give up their wills to a very few, that are neither wiser nor better than themselves. But “is there not a decay of that tender affection, that reverence and esteem, with which the primitive Methodists received their Preachers.” Yes, certainly. This is another evil we have to complain of. But let me ask you; Can it enter into your minds that any who read your Letter, and believe as you teach, that the whole body of Preachers rule the Societies in an *unscriptural* and *oppressive* manner, (which are your words) and in a manner that has no parallels save in the Papal authority, and in tyrannical civil Governments,—can you suppose, I say, that they will hereby get either their *affection*, or *reverence*, or *esteem* for the Preachers increased? Alas! my Brethren, how sadly have you mistaken your way!!

The permitting persons to be employed as spiritual guides who have not the confidence of the people may be an evil, and the source of some other evils; but you don't seem to be at all aware of *one thing*, and that is, that in consequence of the difference of opinion and consequent strife, which has pervaded the whole body, (evils to which some of you have contributed your part) some of the oldest and most approved Preachers of the Connexion have not the confidence of the party whose scheme they do not abet, and whose sentiments they do not espouse. Thus, the Preachers that are friendly to the introduction of the Sacrament have the confidence of that party, but not of those that adhere to the old way. On the other hand, those that are advocates for the continuance of the Methodists in the established Church, have the confidence of those whose views accord with their own, but not of those who differ from them. This is an evil indeed; an evil of the first magnitude, for it threatens entirely to divide and therefore to destroy us. But of this you seem quite insensible, and imagine that “if ever an Assistant were obliged to act in conjunction with a Leader (or I presume you mean, a majority of the Leaders where there are several) it would satisfy all parties, and remove every just cause of complaint.” Alas! my Brethren, how little you know of the state of

of our Societies! "*Satisfy all parties!*" No indeed. I can testify to the contrary. I can produce a Preacher who acts in conjunction with a *majority* of the *Trustees*, with *all* the *Stewards* and at least *two thirds* of the *Leaders*, and yet cannot satisfy the opposing party; unless, with a view to abet and forward their designs, he would take steps disapproved of by these sundry descriptions of persons, and act in open violation of the late Plan of Pacification.

These and many more things of a similar nature make it evident, beyond a doubt, that your Position in the fifth page, although printed in Capitals, is totally void of foundation, viz. that "a want of deliberation with the people is the great source of all those evils, that exist among us, and that it has already greatly shaken the confidence of many." So far from this being the case, there is reason to doubt whether it be the source of any of the evils you refer to. And as to its shaking the confidence of many, how can this be the case, when you tell us (P. 4,) that "you have repeatedly said that the Preachers in general have the confidence of the people," and (P. 5,) that "the leading men in the Conference, (the men, I presume, that chiefly manage matters and influence the rest) have sufficiently proved their regard for the people to prevent any suspicion of their designs." These things, hardly seem consistent: and other things, which you assert, still less so. For instance, P. 5, you tell us "at present all is *doubt*, *darkness*, and *distrust*, and must grow worse every year, unless a miracle be wrought, to convince the people, that every new Preacher, is sent of God:" that, "there is a *majority* in the Conference, who are far from being generally known to the Connexion, and who never had an opportunity of proving the purity of their designs." And yet, you have repeatedly said that the Preachers *in general* have the confidence of the people." These things, I say again, are not easy to be reconciled to each other!

One thing perfectly astonishes me in your Letter. You speak as tho' it were the *study* of the Preachers, to introduce improper persons into the connexion, and as if they had some motive for so doing. "The door is open and improper persons are and will be admitted:" "Preachers may be smuggled into the
Con-

Connection." "There are Preachers recommended to
 Conference, perhaps every year, who have not a
 good report." What possible inducement can we have
 to act as you suppose? What end *have we*, or can we
 have to answer, by the introduction of such persons?
 Will they increase our congregations, or enlarge our
 Societies, and thereby add to our income? Or will
 they do us *honour* and render our body more respect-
 able in the nation? Surely we must know that the
 very reverse of this would follow such proceedings.
 You speak of many of us as *ignorant* and *weak*, but we
 must be more so than you suppose, to pursue
 such a conduct as you lay to our charge. Methinks a
 moment's reflection, might convince you that we have
 every possible motive, to induce us to take particular
 care that no person be admitted amongst us that is
 unfit for the work. Accordingly great attention is
 paid every year to this subject; much more, I am
 certain, than was paid to it in Mr. Wesley's days.
 Whenever a person is proposed to travel, all possible
 enquiry is made, (according to the solemn injunction
 recorded in the large Minutes, concerning his *moral*
character, his *christian experience* and *piety*, his *abilities*
 for the work, and the *fruit* already produced by his
 labours, as a Local Preacher. And unless a majority
 of the Conference be satisfied on all these heads, he is
 not received. That they are never mistaken in their
 judgment of any one, I do not assert. But that great
 care is and will be taken, I am well assured. Again
 after a person is received on trial, if it appear by the
 representation of the *Leaders*, *Stewards*, *Trustees*, or
 any of the people among whom he was appointed to
 labour, that the Conference had entertained too
 favourable an opinion of him, and that he is manifestly
 wanting in some or other, or all of these qualifi-
 cations, he is set aside. Nay and if this appear many
 years after he is admitted into full connexion, still he
 is dropped. Now if you add to this the power above
 mentioned, given by the last Conference to the *Trustees*,
Stewards and *Leaders* of every Circuit to reject or
 dismiss on certain conditions, any Preacher, appointed
 for their Circuit, you must see, I think, that all is
 done that can be done to secure the purity and respect-
 ability of the body. In this point, I believe, that
 Preachers are more righteous than the people. For
 instances

stances have been and are not now wanting, in which the *District Meetings* have *suspended*, nay and the whole Conference *excluded* a man, upon manifest proof of immorality, and yet, in despite of the Preachers, the people in different places, nay and the Leaders, although they were not ignorant of the proofs of his guilt, have persisted to countenance and encourage him. I could name the persons and places, were it needful.

Believe me, Brethren, we have it as much at heart as you can have, to correct abuses of every kind, and form a Plan, were it practicable, "that would for ever put an end to separate interests and destructive jealousies." But while you yourselves are so divided in your sentiments and views, we despair of being able to attain any such end, and are very apprehensive that after all that can be done to preserve our union, these disputes and contentions, fomented no little by this sort of writing, will terminate in an entire and final separation. If so, it will be much to be regretted that we did not divide sooner, I mean before the appearance of your Letter. For had the mournful event happened last Conference, we certainly should only have been *two parties*, but should it take place now, we shall infallibly be crumbled into *four*: this event so much to be dreaded, those parts of your Letter which wear a threatening aspect, will be found greatly to accelerate. "If the Conference do not act immediately as you propose, the Circuits, your prophecy (P. 6.) will take the matter into their own hands, and act on principles you deprecate;" and the "smothered flame will break out with irresistible violence." For that, "the people do not want means of effecting their own designs. They can determine to keep the Preacher's Fund, (you mean only what they themselves occasionally subscribe to it) the Ticket-Money, and the Yearly and Kingswood Collection, in the hands of the Town and Circuit stewards, can prohibit any person from leading a class, or entering a Pulpit, till he has had the approbation of the majority of the *Leaders*, and Quarterly Meetings," &c. &c. These and many other such like dreadful things they can do. Well, my brethren, and what then? We too have at least one thing in our power. We can quietly withdraw from the Society of such unrea-

unreasonable men, who in all these years have learned so little obedience to those that spoke the word of God to them, and watched for their souls, as those that must give an account. After spending our *youth*, and *health*, and *strength* in ministering to those that so unworthily requite us, we can seek an asylum, amidst the increasing infirmities and afflictions of declining age, in some sequestered spot, crying out in the language of the Prophet, *I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.*

Well but, "Should any of the Preachers determine to leave us, merely because the people are resolved to be consulted, (say because a few leading men formed an Aristocracy, and then resolved to invert all order, could they be justified by their own consciences, the unprejudiced reason of good men, or the infallible word of God." Yes by *all these*, as this letter fully evinces. And should disagreeable consequences follow upon your stepping forward, in this manner, (of which you seem to be apprehensive,) they may be attributed to very different causes from those you mention: viz. not "to the *inattention* or *opposition* of the Preachers," to any thing reasonable or proper as you say, but to your *inattention* and *opposition* to St. James's important doctrine (ch. iii. 1.) *My brethren be not many Masters.*

Once more and I have done. You declare solemnly in the beginning of your Letter "that the end you propose is a *stricter union* of Preachers and people," and that it is "your *sincere intention* to labour to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." In this point I give you credit. The knowledge I have of many of you leaves me no room to doubt the truth of what you affirm. But how exceedingly were you overseen then, when in a Letter, the professed design which was *peace* and *unity*, you inadvertently threw out so many expressions, which even if *true*, could have no tendency but to exasperate; but if *false*, many affirm them to be, will be found much more provoking. I had made out a list of these to be inserted in this Letter, but as I have too much esteem and regard for you to wish to excite the resentment of any of my brethren against you, I shall suppress it, and only beseech you for the sake of that *mutual love* which is the chief badge of our discipleship, and with which

which all we profess is nothing, to have done with this
 kind of language. Believe me, you have it not in your
 power to harm us. What do we gain by serving you
 at an uncertain and precarious subsistence, with re-
 volution, labour, disquiet, and an unsettled and wan-
 dering life? I had almost said, to be *fugitives and va-*
gabonds upon the earth? Hath not God set us forth
 (like the persons brought forth in the Amphitheatre
 at Rome in the after part of the day appointed
 to certain death by the teeth of wild beasts) and
 made us a *spectacle to the world, to angels and to men?*
We are fools for Christ: but ye are wise in Christ: We
are weak but ye are strong. Ye are honourable: but we
are despised. Even to this present hour, if we do not
hunger and thirst, if we are not naked and buffeted:
yet we have no certain dwelling place. And if we do
not many of us labour, working with our own hands,
yet we travel almost daily, in all weathers, sometimes,
indeed, on horse-back, but frequently, of late years,
on foot, that we may bring you the glad tidings of sal-
vation, as free of expence as possible, and may seek
and save the lost sheep of the house of our Israel.
Being reviled we bless, being persecuted, we suffer it.
Being defamed we intreat. We are made the filth of
the earth, and the offscouring of all things to this day.
We write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved
children, (which, if I mistake not, some of you are,)
to warn you. While many, if not of you, yet of our
people, who thro' us, or our Predecessors in the work,
rose from nothing, and are not a whit before some
among us, either in abilities or diligence, have amassed
great wealth, purchased estates, and built themselves
houses of cedar, we, with our wives and little ones,
are still dependant upon the contributions of others for
maintenance, removing from place to place, year by
year, and day by day, and leading a pilgrim-like life, at
your call and to serve your eternal interests, if not even
sometimes to gratify your curiosity and your itch for
novelty. And why? because we are in love with such
an unsettled and wandering life? Alas! my brethren,
you know little of human nature, if you think so.
Make the experiment yourselves. Several of you are
teachers and believe yourselves called to the work.
Come out then, and go with us into the high-ways and
edges, travelling without intermission, from city to
city,

city, from town to town, from village to village, to publish the Gospel of the grace of God. Give up the gains of your Trade and Merchandise, leave your warm and comfortable habitations, with all your connections and engagements, and spend the rest of your few days in helping us to *seek and save lost souls*. But if you *cannot* or *will not* do this: if it be too great a sacrifice for you to make, at least let us request of you, not to discourage and thereby hinder those that have already made it, or are disposed so to do. Do not weaken our hands in God, nor add to our burden, already greater than we frequently know how to bear. But, on the contrary, as I have, by experience, known many of you do in days of old, lighten it all you can, or assist us to bear it. Many a time did you refresh my bowels in the Lord, during the three years I laboured with unspeakable satisfaction and comfort, and, I hope, with some success among you. Your counsel and advice, your countenance and support, were not, at any time, withheld from the noble cause in which we were all engaged. Often, did you accompany me on foot and horseback, when I went with a message of mercy to any Town or Village, to which Christ had not been preached, and if there was any danger, failed not to stand foremost to meet it. I cannot forget those days, my brethren. The recollection of them is pleasant, and draws tears from my eyes while I now write. And shall we now fall out by the way, and after we have travelled on in company towards the heavenly Canaan so many years, shall we part at last, as though we were not directing our course to *one* and the *same* end, *one Mount Zion, one city of the living God, one heavenly Jerusalem*? Are we not the servants of *one Lord*, the children of *one Father*, and the heirs of *one inheritance*? Have we not long professed *one faith*, and believed ourselves to be called in *one hope* of our calling? And are we not *members of one body*, inhabited by *one spirit*? Let us then love as brethren, and be pitiful and courteous. Let us feel for and sympathize with one another and all the followers of our common Lord. Let us draw in *one yoke*, and unite our counsels and endeavours to help forward that great work of reforming and renewing mankind, for which the Son of God came into the world, and for which he shed his precious blood. Let us strive to restore the spirit of primitive

ive Methodism, which some think is greatly decayed amongst us, the spirit of seriousness and watchfulness, prayer and praise, of self denial and mortification, zeal and diligence, of simplicity and sincerity, of meekness and patience, of joy and love, of deadness to the world and devotedness to God. Here, my brethren, is work enough for us all, and work that must be done, or notwithstanding any and all external relations, our glory will depart from us, and we shall not be able to bear witness, like our late aged Father, with our dying lips, that the best of all is, *God is with us*.

Believe me, my brethren, believe him, or rather believe the Scripture: *This is the best of all*. If we have this, we shall go on and prosper, in spite of all opposition, and notwithstanding all the late contentions whereby Satan has thrust sore at us that we might fall. But if we have not this, no alterations of our Plan, or proposed amendments of our system, will be able to serve us. O God, do thou arise for us! Do thou uphold thy power and come among us and save us! Do thou look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels, and of thy mercies towards us? Are they restrained? Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer, thy name is from everlasting. Oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens! that thou wouldst come down! that the mountains might flow down at thy presence! As thou didst wonderful things which we looked not for. Thou meetest those that rejoice and work righteousness, that thou remember thee in thy ways: but, behold thou art wroth, because we have sinned. But now, O Lord, thou art our Father; we are the clay, and thou art our potter, and we shall be the work of thy hands. Be not wroth very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity for ever! Behold, we are thy people. In all our affliction thou hast afflicted: The angel of thy presence saved us. In thy mercy and in thy pity thou redeemed us, and bare us and didst us all the days of old. For we will mention thy goodness-kindnesses, and thy praises, according to all that thou hast bestowed on us, and the great goodness thou hast shewn to us. We will remember the days of old, our Moses and his saying, Where is he that brought them up out of the land of Egypt? the

the sea, with the Shepherd of his flock? Where is he put his holy Spirit within them? that led them, by the hand of his Sergeant, with his glorious arm, to make him an everlasting name? that led them through the deep, they should not stumble, and whose spirit caused the rest?—And it came to pass when Joshua was by Jericho he lift up his eyes, and looked, and behold there stood a over against him, with a sword drawn in his hand: Joshua went unto him and said, Art thou for us, or our Adversaries? And he said, Nay, But as Captain the Lord's host am I now come. Amen! even so Lord Jesus, and lead us on to conquest and a crown

I am,

Dear Brethren,

Your affectionate Brother,

JOSEPH BENSON



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